4 THE FIRST EMPIRES: QIN AND HAN

THE SUCCESS OF the Qin armies in 221 BCE marks a fundamental turning point in Chinese history. From that date forward China would normally be unified under one central regime. In periods when central rule was weakened, the ideal of a centralized state nonetheless remained potent. And even in periods of actual political division (the Northern and Southern Dynasties, or Liao, Jin, and early Yuan), the goal of a unified state still preoccupied the minds of statesmen and motivated their actions. What Qin accomplished took several decades of intense warfare against the other "strong states" of the late Zhou period. But warfare was only one part of this story, and arguably not the most important. Qin created a state organized in pursuit of its own goals—political, economic, social, and military—that became a model for all later authoritarian, centralized imperial regimes. The notion that the state, as manifest in the emperor, his court, and bureaucracy, could control and direct all aspects of society proved to be far more important for later Chinese history than the strategies of Qin generals. Qin's contributions cannot be underestimated, even if its rule did not endure.

The two Han regimes, by contrast, were long lived, and they successfully institutionalized and elaborated much of what Qin initiated. The Former (or Western) Han dynasty ruled from Liu Bang's victory over his rivals in 202 BCE until usurpation by a high court official, Wang Mang, in 9 CE. By most accounts, this dynasty was a time of general prosperity, of growing central power, and of military expansion in several directions: northeast, southwest, and northwest. The Later (or Eastern) Han that followed the demise of Wang Mang was a "restoration" in name only. Although the Liu family was again ascendant, in fact the former imperial line was replaced by a distantly related branch. This period from 25 to 220 CE differed from its earlier namesake. Central power was more and more in question. Struggles within the court and capital among distaff relatives and eunuchs polarized elite society. Prosperity in the countryside did not mean greater wealth for the state, as local magnates gained de facto autonomy. Scholars (the class from which officials were drawn) were often alienated. The peasantry suffered and sometimes rebelled. Contacts with foreign cultures grew, and Buddhism made its initial appearance within China proper. While on the whole the two Han dynasties were relatively stable, they were nonetheless dynamic societies.

THE IMPERIAL STATE AND SOCIETY

The achievements of the Qin dynasty were the subject of analysis and debate soon after its fall, c. 206 BCE. Han writers often vilified the First Emperor of Qin (*Qin shi huangdi*; on this term see page 137 below) and his ministers for their

4-1 Disk, *bi*
Former Han, 2nd century BCE. Nephrite, height 10" (25.9 cm). Tomb of Liu Sheng, Mancheng, Hebei. Hebei Cultural Relics Institute, Shijiazhuang

According to *Huai nan zi* (*The Book of the Prince of Huianan*; 2nd century BCE): "A shoreline divided the primordial *qi*. That which was pure and bright spread out to form Heaven; the heavy and turbid congealed to form Earth… The conjoined essences of Heaven and Earth produced *yin* and *yang*…" (Major, *Heaven and Earth*, p. 62.) To Han thinkers this disk symbolized not only Heaven but also the origins of the cosmos.

harsh policies and immoral acts: the burning of the books and killing of scholars, for example. This tendentious writing continued as memories of Qin faded. Qin has been used as a handy negative example by writers addressing government policies and problems up to recent decades. More often than not the First Emperor has been seen as a villain, although in the political campaigns of the 1970s he was remade into a progressive. The new order imposed by the Qin was revised under the Former Han, but many features survived intact. Never again would China break up into a collection of warring states ruled by hereditary nobles. The new empire redefined many of the terms of society and of life for the millions of people living within its bounds.

Qin Unification

The First Emperor promulgated an administrative system in which his realm was divided into thirty-six commanderies. All were governed by a trio of appointees sent out from the capital at Xianyang (near modern Xianyang, Shaanxi): a civil governor, a military commander, and an inspector who reported to the court. These officials shared authority locally but were closely controlled by the court, which placed strict limits on their power. The court also required the local population to pay taxes and provide labor service (corvée). Law governed all aspects of this system, and excavated documents testify to the implementation of the Qin statutes at the local level. To consolidate his power over the defeated six states, the First Emperor ordered the destruction of defensive "long walls" and city walls. He kept a strong army in the field along the northern frontier and used it and other laborers to construct large-scale public works such as defensive lines (see "The Myth of the Great Wall," page 121), roads, and canals. The best known of the First Emperor's measures were designed to integrate regional economies. Axle widths were standardized so that carts could move smoothly along the rutted roads. Officially issued weights and measures for commodities were made uniform so that all markets operated with a common set of standards. Standardized script replaced the several regional writing systems that had flourished in the Warring States period (compare FIGS. 3-2 and 3-3).

The First Emperor made several long circuits of his realm during the decade (221–210 BCE) he ruled. Most included lengthy sojourns near the eastern coast in modern-day Shandong and Zhejiang. *Historical Records* (*Shi ji*, c. 100 BCE) contains transcriptions of some of the texts carved in stones set up to memorialize the emperor's achievements. Only two stones with inscriptions, the Taishan and Langye Tai stones, have survived. They and four others are actually studied through rubbings of later date, such as the one reproduced here (FIG. 4-2). The calligraphy is traditionally attributed to Li Si, a chancellor who presided over the Qin victory. The graphs on these stones are elegant renderings derived from the Eastern Zhou "small seal" (*xiao zhuan*) script that, in turn, grew from script employed on Western Zhou bronzes (see FIGS. 2-6 and 3-2). The text is written in vertical columns so that each character is separated from its neighbors by even spacing. In fact, the graphs appear to be contained within imaginary grids or rectangles. Individual characters are taller than they are wide, with a strong central axis and a composition carefully balanced around that axis. The two characters for "emperor" (*huang* and *di*; see first column top right in FIG. 4-2), for example, are completely symmetrical side to side. The spacing of parallel horizontal strokes is also regular. Strokes are even in width throughout their length and begin and end as slightly rounded forms. There are no flourishes that might reveal the actions of a pliant brush tip. This script was the model for texts incised on the weights and measures issued under imperial command.

2 "Small seal" script
n, c. 219 BCE. Detail of
obing, Yishan Stone.
ational Museum of History,
ijing

na Qian reports: "In his
th year, the First Emperor
ent eastward to inspect the
mmanderies and counties
d climbed Mount Yi in
u, where he erected a
one monument." (Nien-
auser, *Grand Scribe's*
cords, vol. 1, p. 138.) The
shan Stone was lost by the
ng period (618–906 CE),
t rubbings like this one
ere made using a replica
eated in 993 CE from rub-
ngs then available.

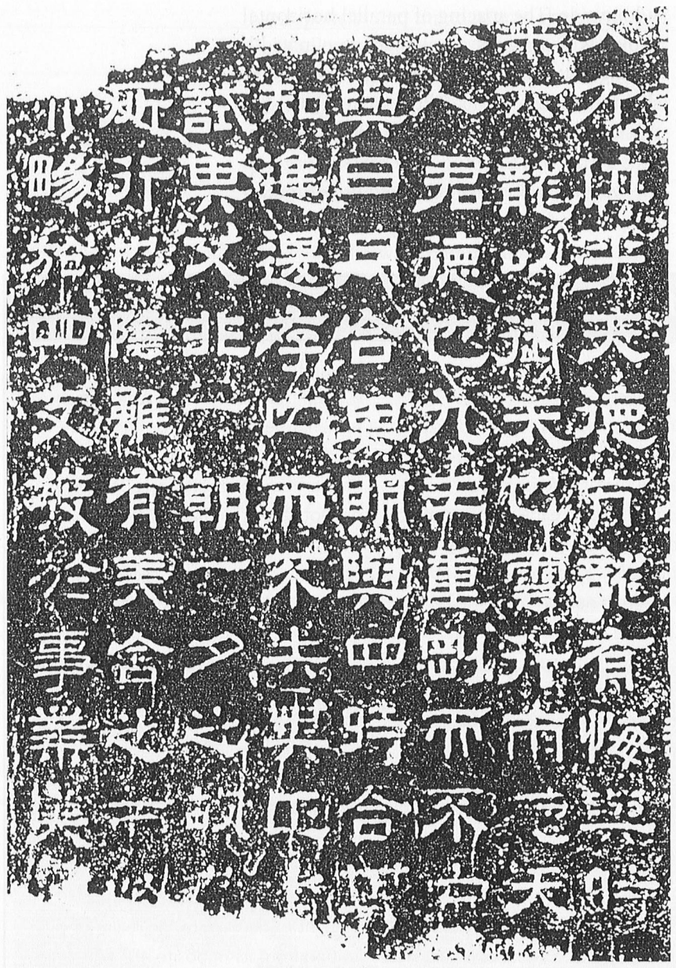
The Myth of the Great Wall

The best-known achievement of the First Emperor is surely the Great Wall. *Historical Records* documents the emperor's charge to his general, Meng Tian, to construct defensive lines across much of the northern frontier (modern-day Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Hebei). The general in turn mobilized impressed laborers, convicts, and soldiers. Their work was a combination of repairing and connecting existing walls constructed by the preunification states of Qin, Zhao, and Yan and of building new segments. These lines were for the most part made from pounded earth (see "Building with Pounded Earth," page 57), but in some areas stone was also used. In spite of the wall's later fame, *Historical Records* merely states:

> After Qin had unified the world, Meng Tian was sent to command a host of three hundred thousand to drive out the Rong and Di along the north. He took from them the territory to the south of the Yellow River, and built a long wall, constructing its defiles and passes in accordance with the configurations of the terrain. It started at Lintao and extended to Liaodong, reaching a distance of more than ten thousand *li*. After crossing the Yellow River, it wound northward, touching Mount Yang.
>
> (Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, p.17, modified)

The text links the construction to campaigns against the steppe peoples on Qin's northern frontier. The term "long wall" (*chang cheng*) is found in early accounts of defensive walls built by several states as early as the seventh century BCE. The distance, expressed as "ten thousand" *li*, seems to connote simply "a great number" or "myriad."

After the Qin, other walls were built, but the "long wall" associated with Meng Tian and the First Emperor accrued specific symbolic associations. In political writings, the project became an example of over-reaching ambition and grandiose schemes associated with a megalomanic ruler. In popular literature, the suffering of the workers under Meng Tian became a recurring motif, exemplified by the account of a worker who died on the job. His body was interred in the wall rather than given a proper funeral. It is well known that Marco Polo never mentions the Great Wall, but early European visitors such as the Jesuits reported its existence and linked what they saw to the Qin. What they and other more recent visitors observed, however, was actually a series of much larger, stone and brick-clad walls erected under the Ming (1368–1644 CE), most during the sixteenth century. The Ming Great Wall was a response to a failed frontier policy and the continuing threat posed by the Mongols, then only recently evicted from China. This structure, in turn, has been the source for more modern myths. As early as the 1930s, the cartoon series "Ripley's Believe-It-or-Not" asserted that the Great Wall was the only man-made structure visible from outer space. More recently it has been claimed that astronauts observed the wall from their spacecraft or from the moon. None of this is true, any more than one can see the American interstate highways from outer space. More fundamentally, writings about China have employed the Great Wall to symbolize a perceived boundary between sedentary, agricultural Chinese civilization and nomadic, pastoral cultures of steppe peoples. It is thus thought to demarcate the realm of civilization from its opposite, the barbarian peoples who preyed on China and sometimes overran it. In fact, in traditional societies, state boundaries were much less fixed and far more permeable than in modern states. Many non-Han (non-Hua–Xia) people lived within the lines of the Qin "long wall" or Ming Great Wall. Likewise Chinese authority was extended beyond those limits from time to time as well. As a cultural divide, the Great Wall was always more myth than reality.



4-3 "Clerical" script
Later Han, 2nd century CE.
Detail of rubbing, Han "Stone Classics." Institute of Archaeology, Beijing

Structure of the Han Realm

Like the Qin, the Former Han regime was divided into commanderies administered by appointees sent from the imperial capital, Chang'an (Xi'an, Shaanxi). However, the court gave a significant portion of the eastern territories to loyal followers and allies of the founding emperor in the form of "kingdoms," which in principle were practically independent fiefs. Officials served the rulers of these fiefs in a system modeled on the imperial court and owed the imperial court yearly visits and tax revenues. Over the course of the first century of Han rule the number of kingdoms was gradually reduced, and, moreover, the kings (or "princes") were replaced with sons from the imperial family. Although these kingdoms never altogether disappeared, their real power had been decisively reduced by about 100 BCE. Their actual administration and status came to differ only in name from that of commanderies. Within both commanderies and kingdoms, the next and lowest level of imperial administration was the county, *xian*, still the basic unit in China today, the number and size of which fluctuated in response to growth and shifts in population. In Later (Eastern) Han times there were about 1500 of them. The magistrates who administered these counties were charged with an awesome array of tasks, including population registration, tax collection, public works, and public security. The local, commoner population of the realm interacted with the imperial government by submitting taxes and participating in public works.

The officials who staffed the imperial government, both at the center and in the counties, were drawn from the educated male population. The court instituted various measures to bring men into government service, the most common being a recommendation system in which officials nominated candidates as "filial and incorrupt." Candidates were sent to the capital, where they served for a time as gentlemen attached to the palace before being posted to an office. By the middle of Former Han a state-sponsored Academy had been established at the capital, offering instruction in the "Five Classics": *Book of Documents*, *Book of Poetry*, *Book of Changes*, ritual canons, and *Spring and Autumn Annals*. The number of students in this institution increased in the Later Han period, and the state established a second school late in the second century CE. In 175 CE, the court ordered that authorized versions of the "classics" be carved into stone slabs set up inside the Academy at Luoyang (Henan), capital of the Later Han. These definitive editions were to be used as the basis for all government education and examinations, and they attracted an enormous number of students.

The Han "Stone Classics" survive today both as fragments of stone in various collections and as a corpus of rubbings (FIG. 4-3). The principal scholar in charge, Cai Yong (133–192 CE), was a noted calligrapher. His hand may have been the basis for the scribes who wrote out the many thousands of characters. The texts are written in a recently developed script known as "clerical" (*li shu*). Thoroughly indebted to the use of a brush, this manner of writing takes its name from the clerks who developed it. The extract from the "Stone Classics" illustrates some of its most characteristic features. The traits of regular spacing and characters contained within imaginary boundaries are also found in the small seal script discussed above (see FIG. 4-2). The composition of individual graphs is less symmetrical, however, even when this is encouraged by the structure of the graphs. The main reason for this decreased symmetry is the emphasis on flourishes at the end of strokes. The diagonal stroke moving from top left to bottom right is consistently rendered so that the brush flares. Strokes that terminate at lower left as well as horizontal strokes that end to the right achieved a similar emphasis. These flourishes, which required applying more pressure to spread the brush hairs, show the debt to utilitarian brush writing of the day. The same trait can be seen on Han documents written on bamboo slips found in the northwest and documents from tombs in the heart of the Han realm. The "Stone Classics" were influential for centuries to come, primarily through rubbings. The great calligrapher Wang Xizhi (307–379 CE) was much influenced by them (see FIGS. 5-23 and 5-24 below). Since he lived in the south, he must have studied either careful copies or rubbings.

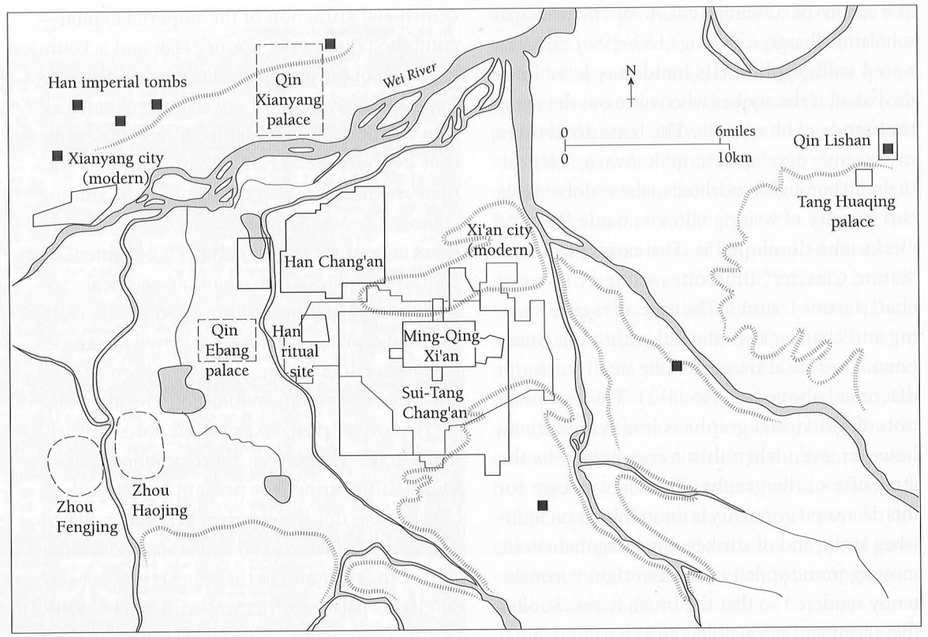
The Qin and Han Capitals

The Wei River valley had served as the capital of the Western Zhou kings. The Qin appreciated its strategic value when they mounted their sustained offensive against the eastern powers. After 221 BCE, Xianyang grew steadily as imperial projects were pursued on a grand scale and as officials and artisans from throughout the empire congregated around the court. These two processes—imperial commissions and the centripetal attraction of the imperial capital—continued during the Former Han and account for much of the grandeur of Chang'an. Remains from Qin Xianyang are less well known than their Han counterparts. The depredations of the army that overran the region account, in part, for their absence. It is also the result of the shifting course of the Wei River, which moved northward, scouring out areas that had been occupied. By contrast, the site of Han Chang'an was neglected by later ages and never inundated by the river. The Han capital is still reasonably well preserved, its walls and foundations clearly visible even today. Extensive excavations continue on a regular basis.

The overall plan of Xianyang is not completely understood. The greatest concentration of palace foundations known at present is a stretch of high terraces north of the river between modern-day Xianyang (to the west) and modern-day Xi'an (across the river and to the south). It is not certain if this palace district was enclosed by walls, or even if the capital had any proper walls. Xianyang was developed over a period of almost a century and a half, but during the First Emperor's reign major projects were sited to the south of the river. These included the famous Ebang Palace, an enormous structure never completed, the Shanglin imperial park, and the First Emperor's own tomb at Lishan (FIG. 4-4) far to the east. *Historical Records*

4-4 Lishan, tomb of the First Emperor
Tumulus, Lintong, Shaanxi. Qin, late 3rd century BCE

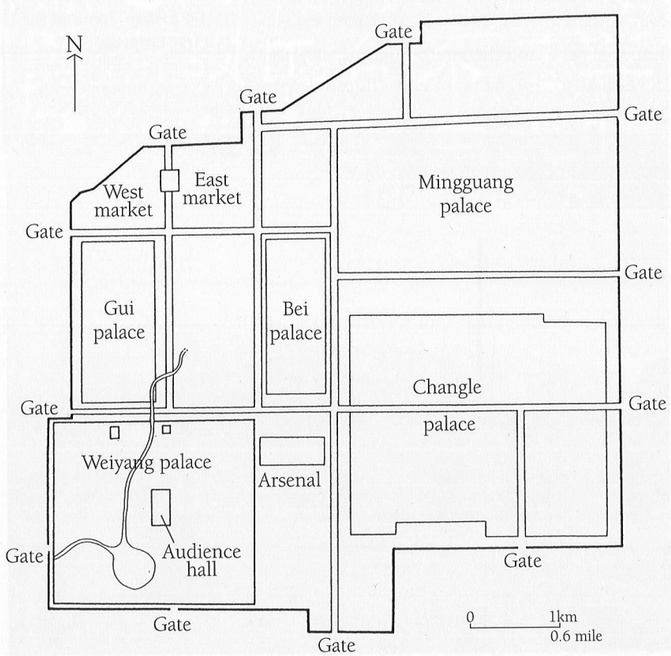
Xi'an Region



claims that the First Emperor of Qin had hundreds of detached palaces spread around the valley on both sides of the river, connected by highways and bridges spanning the river. Thus the entire area served as the capital district, and mountain ranges at north and south took the place of city walls.

Han Chang'an, located immediately northwest of modern Xi'an, has been surveyed in some detail (FIG. 4-5) and its major structures have been investigated. After some debate, the founding emperor's advisors recommended the continued use of the "land within the passes" as the imperial capital. Planners sited the new city around the remains of a one-time Qin palace, which was renamed the Palace of Everlasting Joy (Changle Gong) and became the residence of the empress. It was flanked on the west by the Eternal Palace (Weiyang Gong), where the reigning emperor held court and lived. Only toward the end of the 190s BCE did concerted efforts begin to erect city walls around the palaces. The position of the two main palaces and the irregular course of a small river on the northwest determined the layout of these walls, each about 3.7 miles (6 km) in length. As a result the shape of the

4-5 Plan of Han Chang'an

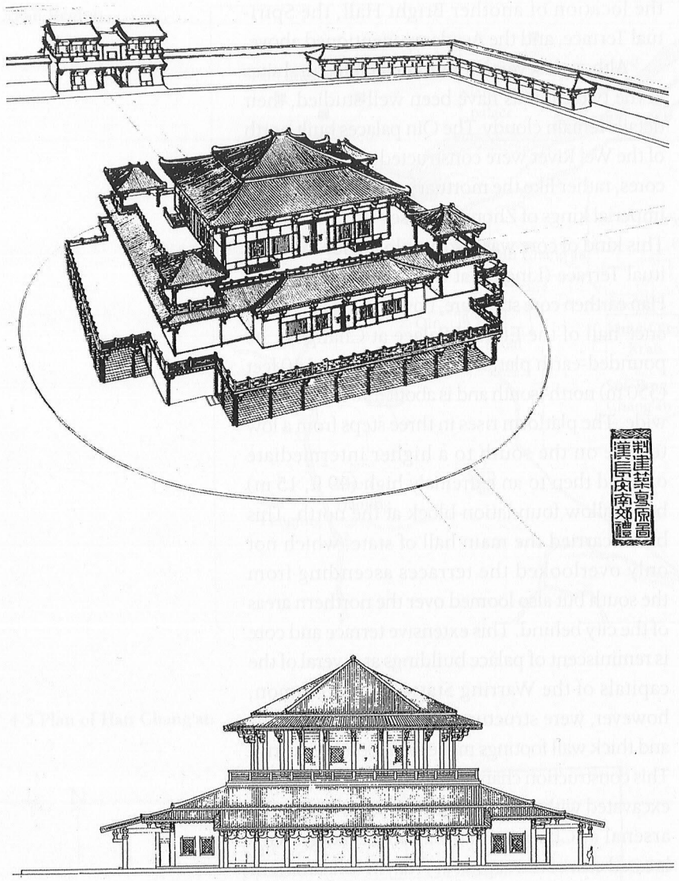


city is highly irregular: a straight east wall, a south wall that jogs south to enclose the Eternal Palace at the west, a fairly straight west wall only 2.8 miles (4.5 km) in length, and a stair-step north wall parallel to the river. The number of gates, three per wall, was more in keeping with the canonical prescriptions of the "royal city" plan (see "The 'Royal City' Plan," page 93). Each gate had three portals, the center one being reserved for imperial chariots. All roads were twelve chariots wide (four chariots per lane). The city site was lower on the north and higher to the south, where the palaces were located. Chang'an was primarily a "palace city," with little area left within the walls for other purposes. The imperial arsenal was located between the two main palaces, just west of the main north–south artery. Markets were sited inside the northwest corner, and the northwest was also a center for workshops of many kinds. Other important sites were developed outside the walls. A major palace was built to the west of the city within Shanglin Park, which in turn was augmented by a large artificial lake, Kunming Chi. A precinct for ritual structures was also constructed due south of the city. This site was the locus of the Bright Hall, the center of imperial rites. By the time of the first census in 2 CE, the population of Chang'an was between 250,000 and 500,000.

Luoyang, the capital of Later Han, was built on preexisting foundations. The city lies about 9 miles (15 km) east of the modern city of the same name (in Henan). A rectangular city, its long dimension ran from the Luo River in the south to the Mang Mountains in the north. In area the city was only about a third the size of Chang'an. As in Chang'an, palaces occupied a high percentage of the land within the walls. The north and south palaces were not aligned on the same axis, and many other irregularities are evident in the walls, gates, and road grid. As at Chang'an, the practical decisions made by the builders considerably muted the power of the "royal city" prescriptive model. Markets were located outside the city walls. Extensive residential wards adjoined the city on both east and west. A ritual precinct was created south of the city in an area that has since been reclaimed by the Luo River. This was the location of another Bright Hall, the Spiritual Terrace, and the Academy mentioned above.

Although several important architectural sites at the two capitals have been well studied, their details remain cloudy. The Qin palaces built north of the Wei River were constructed around earthen cores, rather like the mortuary temples of the preimperial kings of Zhongshan (see FIG. 3-7 above). This kind of core was also employed for the Spiritual Terrace (Lingtai) at Luoyang. The grandest Han earthen core structure, however, was the audience hall of the Eternal Palace at Chang'an. Its pounded-earth platform extends about 1140 feet (350 m) north–south and is about 490 feet (150 m) wide. The platform rises in three steps from a low terrace on the south to a higher intermediate one and then to an extremely high (49 ft; 15 m) but shallow foundation block at the north. This block carried the main hall of state, which not only overlooked the terraces ascending from the south but also loomed over the northern areas of the city behind. This extensive terrace and core is reminiscent of palace buildings at several of the capitals of the Warring States. More common, however, were structures built on low platforms and thick wall footings made from pounded earth. This construction characterizes several compounds excavated within the Eternal Palace, as well as the arsenal at Chang'an, and an imperial granary located east of the capital at Huayin (Shaanxi). In these buildings, deep wall footings, piers, and low foundation blocks supported timber-frame structures that did not depend on an earthen core. Many aspects of their column grids, walls and doors, paving, and the like can be deduced from the remains unearthed at these sites.

The restorations proposed for the Bright Hall (Ming *tang*) at Chang'an (FIG. 4-6) tell us much about the evidence available but rather less about the realities of imperial architecture. This observation is not meant to disparage the contributions of architectural historians who have synthesized the data. More obviously than in many statements made by scholars, however, their restorations are examples of a chain of assumptions and inferences. Their suggestions are logical, but logic does not guarantee historical accuracy, and in many cases alternative logic is equally

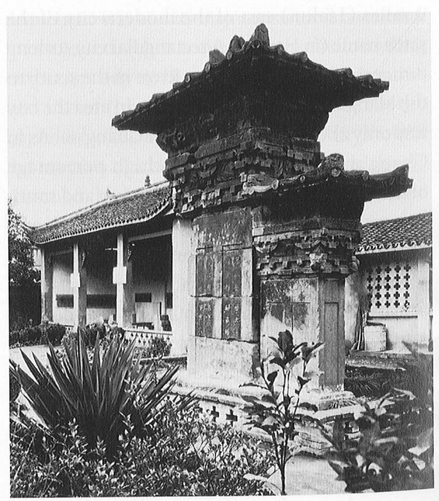


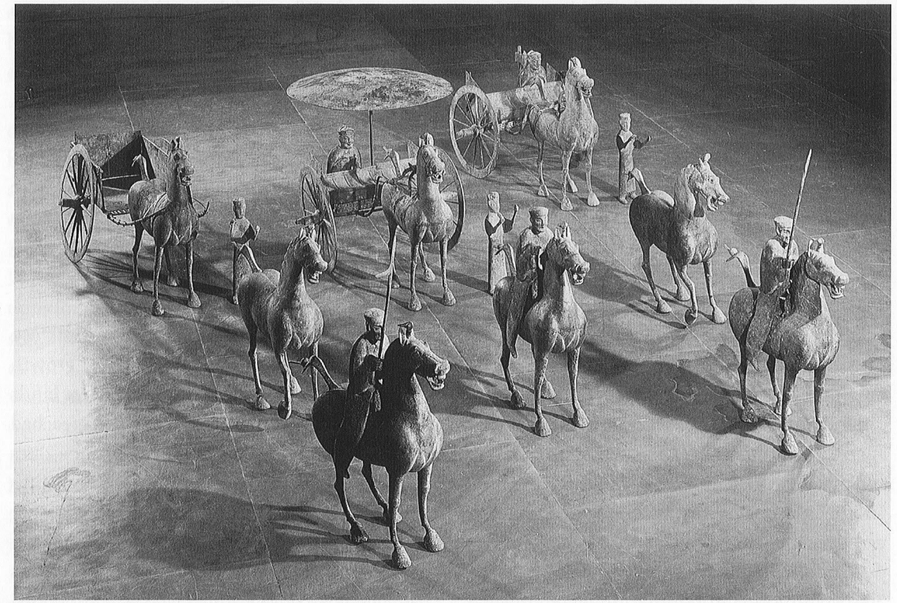
4-6 Bright Hall (Ming *tang*)
Renderings by Wang Shiren and Yang Hongxun

acceptable. In fact, architectural historians have suggested several variant renderings that reinforce the contingent nature of their projects. The foundation of the Bright Hall was only partially preserved at excavation. A channel dug through the site in Tang times (618–907) had demolished the eastern half. Thus restorations start by assuming that the overall plan was essentially symmetrical and that features noted and measured on the west were repeated on the east. In addition, the top levels were not intact. Much less can be said about any feature above ground level than can be determined about the base. The four ground-level chambers set against the core are known in considerable detail because of paving, column bases, and many other preserved features. On the other hand, renderings of the second (and possible third) level remain hypothetical. They are derived from a combination of assumptions, such as Han texts and comparative evidence. For the elevations of such structures, we are largely dependent on Han pictorial art and ceramic models. The key differences between the two renderings concern the presence of an intermediate level of chambers and the top-level hall, which could have had either a pyramidal or a conical roof. Since the base of that level was not preserved at the time of excavation, the choice of one over another hinges on other data. (For the symbolism of the Ming *tang*, see page 137 below.)

The only standing architecture that actually survives are several dozen stone monuments—paired towers, *que*—at tomb sites in Henan and Sichuan, most dating from the Later Han. (Three of Former Han date are located near Mount Song, Henan.) In addition, several stone offering shrines survive in Shandong, the best preserved being the Xiaotang Shan shrine and the shrine of Wu Liang. These stone monuments mimic the ordinary architecture of their day in details such as roofs and bracketing. The right tower at the tomb of Gao Yi dated 209 CE in Ya'an County (Sichuan)

4-7 Gao Yi tower, *que*
Ya'an, Sichuan. Later Han, c. 209 CE. Red sandstone, height 19′4″ (5.9 m)





4-8 General's entourage
Later Han, 2nd century CE. Bronze. Leitai tomb, Wuwei, Gansu. Gansu Museum, Lanzhou

Best known for the "Flying Horse," the tomb at Leitai held an ensemble of 38 bronze horses, an ox, 14 chariots and carts, 17 spear-carrying warriors, and 28 attendants on foot, thought to represent the entourage of a leading general of the region, whose tomb they furnished. In this view, three files of cavalry with long pikes lead the procession.

consists of a main pillar with an abutting smaller pillar to one side (FIG. 4-7). Each pillar is surmounted by several tiers of carving that reproduce the interlocked tie beams found at the top of the walls in frame structures, as well as bracket arms and blocks (*dou gong*) designed to carry the eaves. The eaves, roof, and ridges are also carved in stone to imitate tilework. The details of joinery, bracket arms, and ridge ornaments are probably accurate for the architectural vocabulary of the day. This tower rises to almost 20 feet (6 m) in height. The offering shrines in Shandong, best known for the engravings and low reliefs, give us a general idea of the basic elements of a simple gabled building. It is not certain that their heavy proportions are in fact accurate reproductions of timber structures.

Han Society

The emperor and members of the imperial house stood, unchallenged, at the pinnacle of Han-period society. Families that supplied consorts and empresses were often of rather humble status in the Former (Western) Han, but the selection of a daughter benefitted her relations; not surprisingly, in Later (Eastern) Han, consort families were generally of high status. In spite of the kingdoms and a large number of marquisates, honorary noble titles with fiefs bestowed on worthy persons by the emperor, there was no large entrenched nobility in Han times that could challenge the imperial house. Sumptuary regulations and social privileges set these high-status persons apart from the great bulk of society. In fact, the tombs of several imperial princes and their consorts have proven to be the richest repositories in all of Han archaeology.

At the top of the commoner classes were scholars and officials. The administration of the Han empire required the services of about 120,000 officials, a number which probably does not include county-level subordinate positions. Officials had special privileges and were exempt from the kinds of punishments administered to the rest of society. With an official position came a fixed income, expressed in bushels of grain but actually given out as a combination of grain and cash. Officials moved about the realm in chariots, and the number of chariots and their types varied in proportion to the rank of the official (FIG. 4-8). A very high-ranking person could command

an entourage of outriders, plus soldiers on foot who cleared the road, and accompanying subordinates in smaller vehicles. While scholars were in effect "officials in waiting," they nonetheless could be quite poor. Many famous scholars at some point worked with their hands to support themselves. The close connection between scholarly activities and official position helped bolster the prestige of scholars, and through an official appointment they could achieve financial security or even great wealth.

In theory, the other commoner classes were ranked in descending order as farmers, artisans, and merchants. This conventional pecking order comes from Confucian admonitions that agriculture fulfills a primary need of society and that the suppliers of food should be honored. On the other hand, since mental work was valued over manual labor, farmers could never be part of the elite. Surely the great majority of the 50–60 million Han population were engaged in agriculture and living in rural communities. Artisans, while esteemed to some degree for their work, were not given much status. They might be independent producers or work within state-operated factories. Many laborers in these state shops were either soldiers or slaves. Merchants, the least esteemed social class, had become increasingly influential during the Warring States era. Their lack of social prestige was offset by the considerable wealth many amassed. Indeed some scholar–officials made fortunes as merchants, any qualms about merchant status overcome, it would seem, by the appeal of rewards. Farmers, the most honored segment of society, were often impoverished, while low-status merchants enjoyed great wealth and large land holdings. Thus the economic realities of the time were often at odds with social norms.

High-ranking officials, both civil and military, could become large land owners. The growth of powerful local families with extensive lands and large numbers of dependent laborers reached a peak in the Later Han. Their manors or estates are depicted frequently both in tomb paintings and in ceramic models. An estate was both a manor house for its lord and a defensible outpost if bandits or "barbarians" threatened. Many estates had "guests" or private armies who were supported by the lord to provide security.

4-9 Entertainers
Later Han, 2nd century CE. Rubbing from impressed brick, 15¾ x 18¾" (40 x 48 cm). Chengdu, Sichuan. Chengdu Museum

Picturing Elite Life

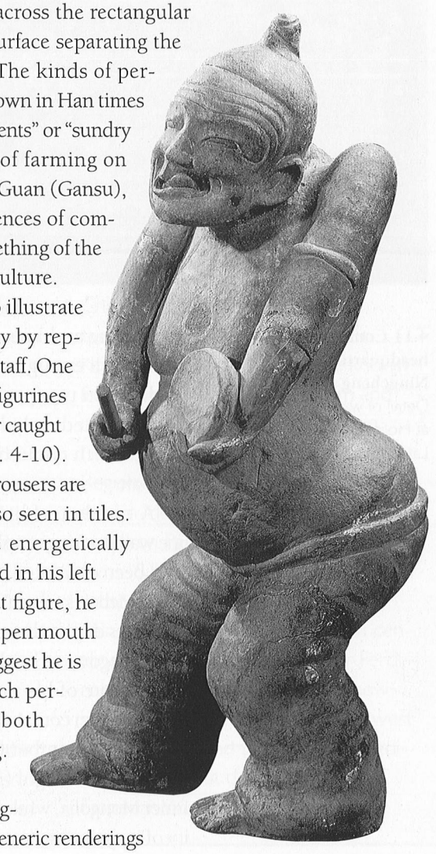
By Later Han times we have extensive pictorial evidence of elite life. No wall paintings survive from the Han period except those made for tomb decoration or deposited in a tomb among grave goods. It is our assumption here that these works share at least a common pictorial vocabulary with murals and other formats in everyday life. At the same time, we should not assume that the limitations of tomb art are also those of Han art generally. Tomb 3 at Mawangdui (Changsha, Hunan) contained a great collection of manuscripts written out on silk, as well as several maps and various charts or diagrams (see "The Land of Silk," page 131, for further discussion of the silk objects found in the Mawangdui tombs). At present these are the only extant examples of these important categories of pictorial art. The qualities found in these illustrated texts are identical to the silk wall hangings mounted on the walls of the burial chamber that served in effect as murals. In this instance, there seems to be no appreciable difference between works made for the living and those painted for the tomb. The energy and expertise invested in tomb decoration, however, must often have fallen below the level expected from artisans enlisted to paint in a palace.

Pictorial decoration within tombs dates to no earlier than the first century BCE (see FIG. 4-21 below), and most examples are found in burials of metropolitan officials at Luoyang. These early paintings are executed on the smooth surfaces of large hollow bricks used for tomb chambers. Lintels and pediment bricks are the favored locations for decoration. Tomb structures changed to small bricks and vaulted construction by the end of the Former Han, and the painting process was altered accordingly. A plaster ground spread over these bricks then became the surface on which painting was produced, as in the Holingol tomb below (see FIG. 4-11). At much the same time, in regions where stone was favored as a building material, such as southern Henan, northern Shaanxi, and parts of Shandong and Jiangsu, artisans cut low reliefs into the blocks used for jambs, lintels, pediments, door panels, and the like.

Some of the most accomplished pictorial designs from the Han are actually close analogs to true painting: impressed bricks placed in the walls of tombs constructed during the second century CE in the Sichuan basin. Better regarded as tiles, since they are flat rectangular slabs of clay, they generally measure about 10–15 by 15–20 inches (25–38 cm by 38–50 cm). Artisans carved boards in intaglio to produce the designs. A clay slab was then impressed onto the board which served as a draw mold, peeled from the mold, and fired. The virtue of these impressed designs is that they survive intact and can produce accurate rubbings (see FIG. 4-9). Since these tiles were first collected and published in the 1940s, art historians have used them both as evidence for pictorial art and for their wide-ranging content. In spite of several dozen painted tombs more recently published, none can yet match the range of subject matter and fine condition of the best tiles.

The subjects illustrated cover many aspects of Han life: seasonal activities of rural society, chariot processions of officials and wealthy land owners, feasting and entertainments suitable for a grand household, the architectural environment, mythological figures, and didactic narratives. A scene of entertainment is typical of many compositions with its carefully constructed groupings, lively activities, and attention to detail (FIG. 4-9). On the left, two pairs of seated figures sit on low couches: the two men at lower left hold panpipes to their mouths, while the man and woman above could be spectators or additional musicians. Four performers seem to be displaying their talents on the right: male and female dancers facing each other at the bottom and two male jugglers at the top. Except for the duplicated panpipe players, each figure in this scene is different from the others, and each epitomizes a characteristic activity. The juggler at top right balances a vase on his elbow while brandishing a long sword at a ball in mid-air. The female dancer at lower right swirls her long sleeves and rotates her head and body while moving further right. The scene is animated and full of entertaining detail. The elements are also evenly disposed across the rectangular tile with plenty of open surface separating the figures and their props. The kinds of performances shown were known in Han times as the "hundred entertainments" or "sundry shows." Like depictions of farming on painted bricks from Jiayu Guan (Gansu), they introduce the experiences of common folk and suggest something of the richness of Han popular culture.

Ceramic figurines also illustrate the life-style of the wealthy by representing their household staff. One of the most accomplished figurines from Sichuan is a performer caught in a vibrant moment (FIG. 4-10). The bare chest and baggy trousers are typical of entertainers, also seen in tiles. He sways forward as he energetically strikes the small drum held in his left hand. For such a heavy-set figure, he is remarkably limber. His open mouth and furrowed forehead suggest he is calling out or singing. Such performers were gifted at both singing and storytelling. Many other occupations are included among Han figurines, but most are more generic renderings



4-10 Singer with drum
Later Han, 2nd century CE. Earthenware, height 26¼" (67 cm). Pi County, Sichuan. Sichuan Museum, Chengdu

4-11 Commandant's headquarters at Ningcheng
Detail of wall painting, tomb at Holingol, Inner Mongolia. Later Han, 2nd century CE

of standing and kneeling attendants that functioned well enough without such active poses. Produced in two-part molds, they are generally distinguished only by the treatment of their limbs, which could be modified while the clay was soft.

A number of brick-chamber tombs with fine wall paintings attributed to Later Han grandees have been excavated, especially around Luoyang and in Hebei (such as Wangdu and Anping). These paintings depict the official staff of the deceased, as at Wangdu, or the chariot processions that were a perquisite of his rank, as at Anping. The latter tomb even contains a "portrait" of the deceased in the rear chamber (see FIG. 4-22 below). But a tomb at Holingol (in Chinese: Helinge'er) in Inner Mongolia, while less impressive for the quality of its painting, is notable for its subject matter (FIG. 4-11). The paintings on the ceilings of the front chamber chronicle the official career of the deceased. This "biography" begins on the west ceiling with a single chariot and the cartouche "raised as filial and incorrupt" in clerical script. This marks the man's initial recommendation as a candidate for official position. At the time, the minimum age was forty, and only one candidate from each commandery could be recommended in each three-year period. The middle of the vault includes a chariot with the inscription "gentleman," probably an abbreviation for Gentleman of the Palace, a post at court in Luoyang that paid 300 bushels. This was the most common initial appointment, usually for a minimum of three years as a member of the imperial bodyguard. Another group of chariots at the left end of this panel includes the inscription "Chief Clerk of He Xi," a region west of the Yellow River in modern-day Shaanxi. This post, which paid 600 bushels, was subordinate to the commandery's governor. A related painting in the tomb's middle chamber shows the headquarters of the commandery at Lishi (modern Lishi, Shanxi). In contrast to the chaotic groups of riders and chariots moving in all directions seen on the west ceiling, the south vault shows a large field with many chariots moving right to left, accompanied by outriders. The cartouche reads "Acting Chief Commandant of Shang commandery dependent state." This was a temporary position with military duties that paid 2000 bushels. Here the entire company of mounted figures and several chariots represents the commandant's entourage. The east vault, by contrast, bears the inscription "Magistrate of Fanyang," a county-level position in northeastern Henan. After a series of frontier military posts, the official was placed in charge of civil administration of a peaceful, interior locality. The salary for this post was 600–1000 bushels of grain, and his perquisites were also reduced.

The climax of this man's career was his appointment as "Colonel-Protector of the Wuhuan carrying a staff of authority." This was once again a frontier post dealing with a non-Han people. An extensive chariot and cavalry entourage is painted on the north ceiling vault, a prominent position immediately visible upon entering the tomb.

The Land of Silk

In the Mediterranean world of the first century CE, the "Seres" were known as a people living at the far ends of the earth. They produced silk, a textile much in demand among Roman consumers. China thus comes into view in the Eurocentric world as the source of a rare and valuable commodity obtained by overland or seaborne trade over immense distances. Unlike the better known Indian subcontinent, ideas about China changed little until the great land travelers of the late Middle Ages, such as Marco Polo. For much of that time, the Chinese had a virtual monopoly on the production of silk. Silk weaving in particular reached great heights during the early empire. The silks that went west were the products of an advanced weaving technology without parallel in the world at that time.

Silk is the natural filament extruded by the silk worm (*Bombyx mori*) for its cocoon. Silkworms had been domesticated in China in early times, probably prior to the Shang. The worms were killed before emerging from the cocoon by drying in sunlight or by steaming—processes which also weaken the sticky gum (sericin) that holds the coiled filament together. Perhaps the most extraordinary feature of these filaments is their length, as much as 2600–3250 feet (800–1000 m) each. This silk is also amazingly fine and extremely strong. Measured in *mu*-diameters (0.001 mm), a filament is only 20–30 *mu* (0.020–030 mm). Thread was made by reeling filaments together. The silk weaves of the Han period utilized many different structures of warp (vertical) and weft (horizontal) threads woven on treadle looms. Plain weaves such as tabby or taffeta have roughly equal numbers of lengthwise (warp) threads and threads carried by the shuttle (weft), usually 50–60 per cm. A much looser gauze will have only 20–25 threads per cm. More complicated fabrics such as damask and brocade necessitated separating specific arrays of warp threads in order to weave the weft-thread patterns. This kind of work requires a draw loom, but the date of this invention in China is not certain. Late Zhou textiles from Jiangling (see FIG. 3-10 above) are evidence of such a loom. Many Han-period textiles are monochromes with woven patterns. Others are polychromes, some woven, others with printed or even painted patterns.

The tombs at Mawangdui (Changsha, Hunan) held the possessions and grave goods of a marquis, his wife, and son, all buried in the first part of the second century BCE. Their riches are featured throughout this chapter. They contained an extensive selection of silk textiles (forty-six rolls in Tomb 1 alone): plain-weave silk, gauze, monochrome damask, complex gauze, polychrome "brocade," and embroideries. A pair of mittens from Tomb 1 (FIG. 4-12) was sewn from two kinds of plain-weave silk and then decorated in chain-stitch embroidery with designs of flying birds. Many robes were made of an unlined, sheer gauze suitable for the hot climate of Hunan. Silk pillows, sachets, and covers for lacquered boxes, musical instruments, and other personal possessions were also present. Both the lady interred in Tomb 1 and her son in Tomb 3 were dressed in multiple garments and then wrapped in several layers of shrouds prior to their placement in the coffin. Both tombs also contained banner paintings on silk (see FIG. 4-24).

4-12 Mittens
Former Han, 2nd century BCE. Silk with embroidery, length 9¾" (24.8 cm). Mawangdui Tomb 1, Changsha, Hunan. Hunan Museum, Changsha

Silk of the Han period has been recovered from many sites outside China proper. In addition to the tombs of colonists in the northern Korean peninsula, Han silks are known from sites on both the southern and northern fringes of the Tarim Basin (modern-day Xinjiang Autonomous Region). They are also reported from sites in Mongolia (Noin-ula), Russia, and even Palmyra (Syria). Although the term "Silk Road"—designating the land routes across Central Asia—was coined only in the late nineteenth century by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen, the Han knew about the peoples living in the far west through trade and the military expeditions carried out during the reign of Emperor Wu.

The colonel's headquarters were located in modern Huailai (Hebei; see FIG. 4-11), but the territory over which he presided included a major horse market at Ningcheng and perhaps even the territory where the tomb itself was located. This post paid 2000 bushels once again. Many subordinates are shown in this painting, including clerks in charge of several bureaus and aides-de-camp. These four ceilings and the related wall panels comprise the oldest extant Chinese pictorial biography. Using a series of chariot processions as he ascends the official ladder of success, the work summarizes the official's career, from the time of his initial recommendation to his highest post. Each step up is noted by inscriptions. The probable dates of this official can be estimated as between 140 and 220 CE.

COURT PATRONAGE AND LUXURY ARTS

The Former Han was an era of economic recovery and growing prosperity. Tax rates on farmers were reduced to a modest level, and the commercial and manufacturing economies flourished. Although the campaigns of Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BCE) became a costly burden, the realm was able to sustain them by interventionist policies that targeted commerce and manufacturing as sources of state revenue. Statesmen debated the role of the government in the economy, most famously in the *Debates on Salt and Iron* (*Yan tie lun*, c. 81 BCE). This account of a court conference provides a glimpse into the economic thinking of the time, especially positive and negative attitudes toward the state's role in the economy and the consumption characteristic of Han society. In spite of changes from one reign to another, the state generally played a major role in the economy. Indeed, state-controlled offices administered most of the projects and categories of production featured in this chapter.

At court several offices were directly concerned with projects on behalf of the emperor. The Lesser Treasury, led by one of the nine ministers who managed the central government, was in charge of collecting revenue for the emperor and of managing all the goods and services needed to sustain his court. The revenues available to the emperor included taxes on natural products of the mountains, oceans, rivers, lakes, forests, and marshes (such as fish and timber), as well as on merchants, and tribute in gold offered by the kingdoms and marquisates. The Lesser Treasury supervised an elaborate secretariat, as well as the harem and eunuchs of the inner court, the court physician, the kitchens, and the offices engaged in specialized production. For example, two Weaving Offices were responsible for preparing the imperial wardrobe. The Office for Manufactures produced all kinds of useful objects, including weapons. The Office for Arts and Crafts created luxury goods of many kinds, some of which are discussed below. The court established a separate agency, the Artisans of the Eastern Garden, to manufacture furnishings necessary for imperial burials. Imperial construction projects—such as palaces, temples, tombs, and parks—were in the hands of the Court Architect. His office was staffed by subordinates who controlled bureaus for acquiring and working stone, timber, and other building materials. Captains, who managed the large labor forces employed in such projects, also served the Court Architect. These workers included soldiers, corvée labor, convicts, and even government slaves. Chang'an and Luoyang were the centers of much economic production on behalf of the court. The volume of that output and the scope of other court projects must have had an immense impact on the economies of those two regions.

In addition, the government administered workshops dedicated to specialized production. The most famous were forty-eight iron workshops and thirty-six salt workshops established in the commanderies. By this time, iron was an essential ingredient in many aspects of life, most especially agricultural and industrial tools. Archaeologists have uncovered state iron workshops that produced farming implements by complex multiple-mold assemblies at several sites in Henan. It has been suggested that the volume of iron production during the Han period was far greater than that in Rome at the same time; indeed European economies reached comparable levels of production only during the Industrial Revolution. Salt, while sold by the state, was actually made by private producers licensed by the government. Revenues from these two workshop systems went to the imperial treasury, not the emperor's own purse. Other workshops included ones for gold production in Guiyang, lacquer and precious metals in Sichuan, and silk in Shandong and Henan. These workshops in many cases grew from local centers first developed during the Warring States era. Government administration thus integrated their production into the national economy in a way that profited the state and the needs of the court.

Objects produced at official workshops generally bear stamps or marks designating where they were made. Some objects, especially lacquer wares and metal vessels, have lengthy inscriptions that detail their manufacture. This inscription was taken from a lacquer cup:

> In the third year of the Yuanshi reign period [3 CE], the Guanghan Commandery official workshop manufactured this *chenyu* lacquered, incised, painted, wood-core cup with gilt handle, with a capacity of one *sheng*, sixteen *yue*. Manufactured by the core-maker artisan Chang, the lacquer artisan Li, the lacquer artisan Jie, the gilding artisan Chang, the painter Fang, the polisher Ping, the inspector Kuang, and the foreman Zhong. Overseen by supervisor Hui, chief Yin, assistant Feng, executive officer Lin, and clerk Tan.
>
> (Wang, *Han Civilization*, p. 86)

This kind of inscription gives a full bill of particulars, from the date and place of manufacture to the object's capacity. Each artisan involved in its production is listed by surname. Other inscribed objects suggest that these families served in such roles for generations. Petty officials supervising the workshop are also specified. These inscriptions provide the first significant collection of specific names linked to the production of arts and crafts; nothing similar is available for production prior to the early imperial era. Although we customarily think of these crafts as "anonymous," in its own time this cup was designated as the product of the skilled labor of a particular shop and its staff. The real motivation behind such inscriptions was to assign responsibility and to control quality. After all, a large percentage of the output of this Guanghan lacquer workshop was destined for court consumption.

Lacquer Wares, Metalwork, and Jade

Denizens of the Han capitals and wealthy land owners ensconced in their rural manors enjoyed a deluxe life-style that rivaled that of the nobility of the Warring States period. Sumptuary norms restricted certain kinds of buildings, chariots, banners, and wardrobe to members of the imperial court and the highest officials. And as in the Eastern Zhou period, there was a sharp break, visible in every detail, between the elite and the bulk of the population. The silk robes of an official contrasted with the homespun or paper garments of a corvée laborer or peasant working in the fields. Wealth gave access to all manner of luxury goods, and their production and consumption were significant to the Han economy. Well-furnished tombs, like the two preserved at Mawangdui (Hunan), are quite literally catalogues of the material culture of the elite and of the kinds of goods they enjoyed in life. The Lady of Dai, interred in Tomb 1 at Mawangdui, was the wife of a marquis. Although he was posted to the kingdom of Changsha (modern Hunan), her husband's home fief and economic base was to the north, in southern Henan. The grave goods found in her tomb, especially the extensive selection of lacquer wares, suggest the real wealth at the disposal of a local notable.

Ubiquitous in elite Han-period tombs, lacquer wares represent a continuation of the regional industries that had flourished in Qi (Shandong), Chu (Hubei–Hunan–Anhui), and Shu (Sichuan). (See "Making Lacquer Wares," page 98.) Many lacquer wares from the Mawangdui tombs bear stamps identifying them as products of state factories in Sichuan. Local production must have continued as well, however, and the heavy lacquered coffins of the Mawangdui tombs were probably made locally (see FIG. 4-16 for detail). Lacquer ware was extremely costly and labor-intensive. One of the protagonists in the "Salt and

4-13 Wine vessel, *zhong*
Former Han, 2nd century BCE. Lacquer, height 22½" (57 cm). Mawangdui Tomb 3, Changsha, Hunan. Hunan Museum, Changsha

Iron" court debate of 81 BCE claimed that "a painted lacquered cup was worth ten bronze cups" and that "a lacquered cup required the labor of one hundred artisans and a lacquered screen that of ten thousand hands." Against such claims, no doubt exaggerated for rhetorical effect, consider the one hundred and eighty-four lacquer objects in Mawangdui Tomb 1. The Lady of Dai was given a ritual service of seven *ding* tripods, four square wine vessels, two round wine vessels, and four covered boxes. In addition she had an extensive food and wine service including: two large tray-tables, eight cylindrical cups, forty "ear" cups, fifty food cups, thirty saucers, two round trays, six bowls, and two ewers. In addition, three food and cosmetic boxes and two pieces of lacquered wooden furniture—an arm rest and screen—filled out her grave goods. Many pieces were inscribed with the name of the Marquis of Dai.

Most of the lacquer vessels in Tomb 1 have a black ground with red designs. The round wine vessel, *zhong* (FIG. 4-13), is typical, one of a pair, each about 24 inches (60 cm) in height. The core is wood turned on a rotary cutting tool. The interior is covered by cinnabar red, while the exterior has a black ground. Painted red bands

4-14 Rhino-shaped vessel
Former Han, 2nd century BCE. Bronze, length 22⅞" (58 cm). Maoling, Xingping County, Shaanxi. National Museum of History, Beijing

demarcate ring foot, body, and neck. Scroll or cloudlike motifs decorate each register in turn. The domical lid, also solid wood, is similarly painted. It has three painted yellow knobs, imitating the gilt fittings found on bronze vessels. This *zhong* lacks the kind of lengthy inscription cited above, perhaps because it was not destined for an imperial consumer. Produced as one of a pair, the *zhong* is also consistent in materials and style with the seven *ding* and four square-section wine containers, *fang*, from the ritual service. All must have issued from the same workshop.

Like silk and lacquer, bronze production flourished in the Qin and Han periods, but increasingly was aimed at secular uses. The great contrast, however, is in the decline of the large sets of ritual vessels that dominated earlier periods. The wealthiest of Han patrons, such as the Prince of Zhongshan buried at Mancheng (Hebei) or the King of Nanyue buried in Canton or Guangzhou (Guangdong), had bronze bells, bronze and iron weapons, and many kitchen vessels of bronze, but only the King of Nanyue—ruler of a vassal state—had the sets of bronze tripods and wine containers akin to those of a late Zhou lord. In the Former Han period, sets of ritual vessels found in tombs typically consist of *ding* tripods, *he* covered boxes, and *fang* or *zhong* wine vessels, but these are normally made of ceramic and presumably therefore were burial goods. (The lacquer vessels found in the Mawangdui tombs could not have served the original functions their shapes imply: a lacquer *ding* could not cook meat over a bed of coals.) Bronze vessels for use in the kitchen and larder, and for elegant service in the palace, on the other hand, are ubiquitous in Han burials and perpetuate many of the techniques of decoration noted in chapter 3. Inlaid metal and stone, glass paste, relief decoration, and undecorated types are all in evidence. One important new technique of decoration is flash gilding. In this process, intense heat bonded gold powder to the surface of a vessel using mercury. The mercury made the procedure a dangerous, even deadly, one. (Only a few Han objects are actually made from cast or hammered gold.)

Both the court bureaus supporting the emperor and regional workshops manufactured bronze goods. In addition, inscriptions on vessels and references to wealthy merchants in historical sources sketch the workings of private workshops that sold their goods on the market. A number of the kitchen vessels from the Mancheng tombs were actually purchased in Luoyang from private vendors. Even some production for the imperial court, as indicated by the phrase *chenyu* found in the lengthy inscription quoted above, found its way onto the market. Lacquerware cups from local officials' graves in such outposts as Lelang (Korea) and Gansu bear this phrase. Rather than imagine these as imperial gifts bestowed on the officials, it is more probable that official workshops on occasion sold off some of their excess product.

Extraordinary objects transcend their practical functions. A large rhinoceros-shaped vessel found in an earthenware crock near the tomb of Emperor Wu (the Maoling) is a *tour de force* (FIG. 4-14). The vessel serves well enough as a pouring device when standing on the animal's four legs, holding liquid, presumably wine, in its ample belly. The server would dispense its contents through a small, cigarlike spout in the proper left jaw. A hinged lid on the back was made to look like a saddle. Cast as one piece, the rhinoceros also bears traces of gold-inlay cloud patterns on its skin. With its stocky legs, the animal rests confidently in an alert attitude, head cocked, neck folds rippling. The haunches and torso suggest real weight and powerful muscles under the skin. One can imagine the exclamations when a servant appeared holding the rhinoceros with an evening's wine course. This rhinoceros

4-15 Drinking cup
Former Han, 2nd century BCE. Nephrite, length 7¼" (18.4 cm). Tomb of King of Nanyue, Guangzhou, Guangdong. Tomb of King of Nanyue Museum, Guangzhou

is simultaneously a sculpture and a practical vessel, a combination of natural description and practical function, a carefully described real animal and a surface for decorative designs.

By Han times, jade had manifold associations, with many traditions of use and craft. Jade objects such as garment hooks, seals, and cups were common among personal accessories and adornment. Jades played an important role in burial, culminating in the jade shrouds of the Han imperial princes and princesses (see FIG. 4-23 below). Imperial ritual also employed jades as tokens to be manipulated in such ceremonial precincts as the Bright Hall. From the time of Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BCE) onward, the Han armies sometimes occupied and controlled portions of the Tarim Basin and the Kunlun and Tianshan ranges where boulders of nephrite were found. Most Han jade carvings are true nephrite, most of it presumed to be from Xinjiang.

Many of the finest pieces recovered from the Mancheng tombs and the tomb of the King of Nanyue (both late second century BCE) exhibit material and workmanship nearly identical to that associated with the late Zhou site of Jincun (Luoyang). The disk, *bi*, now in Kansas City (see FIG. 3-13 above) has a traditional provenance of Jincun and presumably a late Zhou date. Several *bi* from Mancheng (FIG. 4-1) and Canton or Guangzhou must have emanated from the same shop working at the same time. The Mancheng disk shown here carries a pair of addorsed dragons or felines of the same "species" as the two rampant animals on the perimeter of the example now in Kansas City. In the Mancheng disk, however, they are held in check by lengthened bodies that establish a central crest rising above their heads, its height almost equal to the diameter of the disk. It is enlivened by many cut-away passages and incised lines. By contrast with the Kansas City *bi*, this disk is a single field of raised curls in regular rows, without a twisted animal holding a smaller inner ring in place. The color of the stone, the shaping of such details as animal jaws, and the treatment of the field of plastic curls all suggest that these works share a common origin. Further examples from the Nanyue tomb can be cited. Some Former Han jades could actually be heirlooms. One can also imagine that an imperial jade workshop employing some of the same late Zhou families of artisans was still in production in the second century BCE. Jades found in the Mancheng tombs certainly emanated from capital workshops or other imperial factories. Those found in the tomb of the King of Nanyue could well derive from the same workshops if they were gifts from the Han court. Ritual texts of the imperial era claim the *bi* was the symbol of Heaven, conceived as round in Warring States and Han cosmology. Adding dragons to such disks asserted an imperial association, since by this time it was the emblematic imperial creature.

Jade as a luxury commodity is well represented in the tomb of the King of Nanyue (FIG. 4-15), perhaps the richest collection of jades from the Former Han period. An independent kingdom until 111 BCE, Canton was ruled by a line of northerners who took control of this region at the fall of Qin. Sufficiently strong to resist Han force, Nanyue had formal relations with the imperial court at Chang'an and exchanged emissaries and gifts. Thus many of the goods found in this unlooted tomb may have been produced in imperial Han workshops. The drinking cup could be among items offered to Zhao Mei, the second Nanyue king, who died c. 122 BCE. The cup is only some 7.5 inches (19 cm) in length and 2–2.5 inches (5–6 cm) in diameter at its mouth. The horn-shaped body ends in a split "tail" with a symmetrical curl to each side. Incised lines augment ridges on the tails and relief on the body. This is not a rhyton, an animal or human head (compare a Tang example, FIG. 6-37 below), but rather an elaboration of a horn. Easily grasped, the cup cannot hold liquid without a support. One should imagine it had a metal or lacquerware stand.

IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY AND WORLD VIEW

For a discussion of Qin–Han ideology and world view, explicit literary and visual statements amplify one other. Nonetheless, it is important to remember the scope of various belief systems: their temporal, regional, and social limits. These generalities should not be assumed to have been unchallenged or to apply to all social groups, even if many were granted orthodox status by the imperial institution.

The Emperor

At the center of the world and at the pinnacle of human society stood the emperor, *huangdi*, a social class of one. In adopting this term, the First Emperor of Qin linked two ideas: the fabled "Three August Ones and Five Sovereigns" (*san huang wu di*) who reigned in antiquity, and supernatural powers (*di*) already the object of sacrifices in the Qin state. Thus a new term for a new role also recapitulated several ancient strains of thought. The ideal of the "Son of Heaven" (*Tian zi*), received from the Zhou, brought with it the notion of a charge or mandate bestowed by this impersonal power on a man of virtue. The First Emperor, as shown in his stone inscriptions (see FIG. 4-2), was convinced that his right to rule came from the might he possessed more than from a benediction of Heaven. In Han times, however, the role of Heaven's mandate as sanction became increasingly important. The emperor's position became integral to the structure and functioning of the natural world. His ritual duties played a key role in the maintenance of both natural processes and human welfare. In spite of a series of weak boy emperors, both in late Former Han and in Later Han, the institution was firmly established.

The physical shape and structure of the world as described by Han-period writers was interpreted according to several competing theories. Whatever the overall metaphor—a "dome of Heaven" or a yolk in an egg—Heaven was round and Earth square. The human realm was a land mass surrounded by water, and it in turn had both central and fringe zones. The Han empire occupied the center (as the "middle kingdom"), but no competing civilization coexisted with it. The margins were known imperfectly as the territories of bizarre peoples and strange creatures. Those nearest naturally tended to gravitate toward the center to submit to the Son of Heaven. The world was further understood as split into three fundamental components: Heaven, humankind, and Earth. Heaven presided over the human and natural worlds just as the emperor ruled human society. All under Heaven belonged to the emperor, who owed his position to Heaven's mandate and who ritually served Heaven and human society. These concepts—tripartite hierarchy, round and square, and centrality—were literally figured in the overall design of the Bright Hall for which alternative restorations were described (see FIG. 4-6 above). Whether it had two or three levels, its vertical divisions could be equated to the tripartite Heaven–humankind–Earth scheme. As a square yard surrounded by a round water course, it also epitomized the physical shape of the world. With its central and four directional chambers, it incorporated additional symbolic associations with the four cardinal directions and center, which correlated in turn with the "Five Phases" (*wu xing*). The walls of the four outer chambers were in fact painted with colors associated with each direction: east green, south red, west white, and north black. (Yellow, the color of the center, is not verified.) The round tiles that lined the eaves, moreover, carried relief designs of the numinous or divine creatures of each direction, color, and phase: east–green–dragon–wood; south–red–phoenix–fire; west–white–tiger–metal; and north–black–tortoise and snake–water. (The phase of the center was "earth," but a symbolical animal was not established for this direction.) Han texts suggest that the emperor came to each ritual chamber in its season for offerings to the powers, robed in regalia of suitable color and motif, and bearing ritual tokens. The *bi* disk from Mancheng (see FIG. 4-1), itself the shape of Heaven, may represent such a token.

The imperial court employed a considerable bureaucracy to monitor the workings of the world. They did so on the theory that both natural phenomena (stars, eclipses, the winds, and "ethers") and unnatural ones (omens and portents such as prodigies and disasters) relayed Heaven's evaluation of the ruling emperor. The Spiritual Terrace at Luoyang was the headquarters of court astronomers and astrologers. Their detailed observations catalogued eclipses, constellations, comets,

4-16 Detail of red-ground coffin
Former Han, after 168 BCE. Mawangdui Tomb 1, Changsha, Hunan. Hunan Museum, Changsha

and sun spots. Such records are preserved in the dynastic treatises and even in texts from Mawangdui. Omens and portents were also a subject for Han art. Auspicious beasts were depicted in paintings, reliefs, and other media (see FIGS. 4-16 and 4-25). For example, the animals depicted on the faces of the red inner coffin of Mawangdui Tomb 1 include tigers, dragons, horned animals, intertwined dragons, and an ensemble of four creatures with dragons: a winged immortal, long-tailed bird, feline, and white deer. This coffin, like its black mate, is among the pinnacles of extant Han lacquer painting. The horned and hoofed creatures on the end panel (FIG. 4-16) are drawn in a modified profile with heads turned in a three-quarter pose. Paired at each top corner of a square field defined by the border, they are nonetheless not identical, nor is the pulsating ether that courses under and around their airborne bodies. This ether or cloud matter is tied into the more regularized scrolls of the border bands. The creatures flank a central triangular form sometimes interpreted as a reference to a magic mountain such as Kunlun, the abode of the Queen Mother of the West. Like lacquer wares from Mawangdui, this is an art that blends description of real and imaginary creatures with a pervasive cosmic breath to exploit their decorative potential. That blend epitomizes Former Han compositions more generally, as we will see below (FIGS. 4-21 and 4-24). Illustrated portents are also found in Later Han reliefs. Scholars have recognized and studied the stone slabs associated with the shrine of Wu Liang (Jiaxiang, Shandong) since the Song period (960–1279).

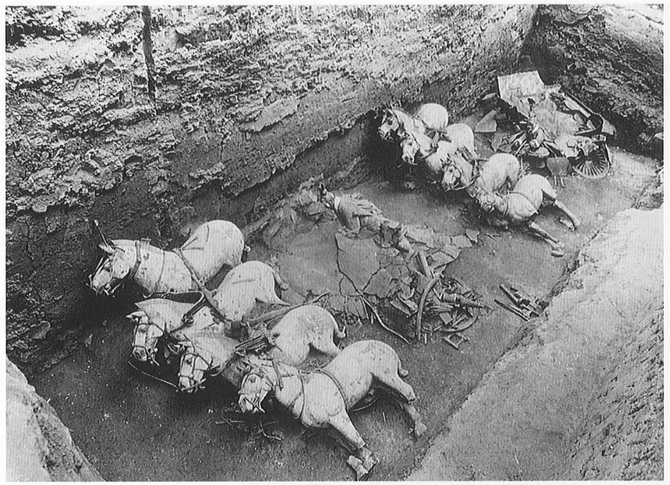
The Tomb of the First Emperor

Although the future First Emperor became King of Qin in 246 BCE, he was then a minor and only achieved effective power in 238. Work on his tomb, called Lishan (see FIG. 4-4 above) after the nearby mountains, must have begun shortly after his accession and continued in several phases under the direction of his chancellors, Lu Buwei and Li Si. The emperor selected a site on the eastern edge of the capital district, near the tombs of his grandfather and father. The most active phase of construction probably began after unification in 221. At that period a massive force of military, corvée, and convict laborers worked both at the Ebang Palace and the Lishan site. The so-called underground army was most probably created during this phase. The final stage of work commenced after the emperor's death in 210 but must have been cut short by the rapidly deteriorating military situation. This monument has never been "lost"; its existence has always been known within China. Placed on the main route approaching Chang'an (Xi'an) from the east, generations of scholars have remarked on the site, and a considerable lore has developed about it. Contemporary attention dates from the extraordinary discoveries in 1974–1975 of three large trenches, some 3900 feet (1200 m) east of the tomb, containing life-size terra-cotta warriors.

The plan of the First Emperor's necropolis summarized the major traditions of burial current in the late Zhou era and was to become a model for Han and subsequent emperors. The site was a felicitous natural setting, sheltered by mountains on the south and drained by the Wei River to the north. The burial is a single tomb precinct of enormous scale, a plan that valorizes the First Emperor's unique status in his day and in history. Unlike the lords of Zhongshan, who were buried within a common precinct (see FIG. 3-7), the First Emperor was isolated in death much as he had been in life. The precinct is a long rectangle nearly 1.2 miles north–south by 0.6 miles wide (2 km by 1 km), with a smaller rectangular inner wall. It was oriented to face east and west, with gates for access from either direction. The pounded-earth mound dominated the southern half of the inner walled area. The mound today is about 1100 feet (350 m) square, with four distinct sides, two steps in its profile, and a flattened top about 80 by 33 feet (25 by 10 m). The height has been much disputed; the best current measurement is almost 250 feet (76 m). It seems unlikely that any structures were erected on the mound. However, the northern half of the inner walled area was subdivided into zones for structures and associated burials. These halls were most probably chambers for sacrifices and support services. Additional burials and pits were arrayed in several zones inside and outside the walls.

The underground components of the tomb are hinted at in several texts, but only a few details have been determined so far through actual probing and survey. The main chamber seems to have had a rectangular shape, 1500 by 1280 feet (460 by 390 m), with unfired-brick walls about 13 feet (4 m) high and thick. It may reach to a depth of more than 96 feet (30 m) below ground level. Several ramps lead into this chamber area, and there are five doors on the east, which may therefore be considered the proper approach. Details of the structure and plan are unknown, but a multiroom chamber of large timbers and stone construction is certainly possible. Textual accounts mention a sky map (painted?) on the ceiling and a topographical map (modeled?) on the floor with circulating mercury representing the waters of the earth. A geophysical survey in the 1980s determined that there were in fact unnaturally large concentrations of mercury under the mound.

Until the recent excavations at Lishan, artifacts directly associated with the First Emperor were limited to the many weights, measures, and weapons from his reign and the several stone inscriptions commemorating his peregrinations (see FIG. 4-2). Two chariots of bronze (FIG. 4-17) probably best represent the work and accomplishments of artisans in the First Emperor's service. Placed end to end in a pit near the west edge of the mound, they occupied merely one portion of a trench with several other as yet unreported compartments. The chariots, scaled at less than half life-size, were originally painted in lifelike colors like the terra-cotta army. Chariot



4-17 Chariots 1 and 2 at excavation
Qin, c. 210 BCE. Lishan, Lintong, Shaanxi. Museum of Qin Figures and Horses, Lintong

4-18 Officer figure
Qin, c. 210 BCE. Earthenware, height 6′5″ (1.96 m). Trench 1, Lishan, Lintong, Shaanxi. Museum of Qin Figures and Horses, Lintong

1 is an open cab with a large round canopy (compare the silk painting from Changsha in FIG. 3-25) driven by a standing warrior armed with a sword. Chariot 2 is a closed carriage with a kneeling driver. The two drivers are identical in style to the terra-cotta warriors, although reduced in scale. Likewise the sturdy four-horse teams that pull these chariots are the same stock as those represented in the trenches. The chariots, however, replicate in great detail all of the fittings and components of horse-drawn vehicles. This attention to specifics is a general characteristic of Qin work, a literal and complete rendering of reality. The two chariots most probably represent some portion of the First Emperor's chariot corps, the ancestor of all imperial entourages; the First Emperor's entourage could have had from nine to eighty-one chariots.

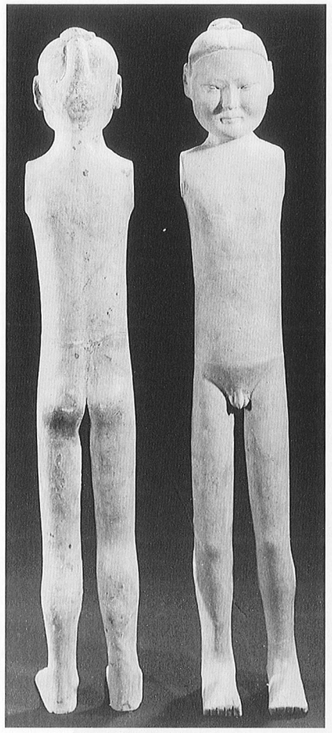
Farmers digging a well in an orchard first discovered the fragments of clay figures that led, in turn, to the many recent excavations around Lishan. The first trench is a rectangular construction nearly 750 feet long by 200 feet wide (230 m by 62 m), subdivided into eleven corridors separated by baulks of earth (see FIG. 0-3). Although only 16 feet (5 m) below ground level, no traces of this trench had been reported prior to 1974. In spite of some handsome smaller clay figures unearthed around the necropolis over the years, no one seems to have anticipated a project like this. The nine main corridors are filled with life-size warriors, four abreast, facing east; the two narrow side corridors have files of two warriors each, the outside file facing away from the main body of the army. A large open area at the east end was accessible by five ramps. More than two hundred warriors in three long ranks, probably the vanguard of the army, stand here. Two additional smaller trenches were discovered on the north side of Trench 1. The trench at the east end was mainly devoted to cavalry and archers (Trench 2); the other at the west end was a kind of headquarters detachment (Trench 3). The total number of warriors in all three trenches is estimated to surpass seven thousand figures.

Impressive as the formations are, the individual figures (FIGS. 4-18, 4-19) are no less intriguing as individual sculptures and as achievements of

the potter's craft. All the warriors, with the exception of the kneeling archers, stand on small clay plinths. (Horses stand on their rather thin, stiff legs without additional support.) Yet these figures weigh hundreds of pounds each. The stances are generally rigid, with both feet firmly planted and torso and arms balanced over the cylindrical legs. In this respect they resemble the vertical supports for the bell chime of Marquis Yi (see FIG. 3-1 above). Several types, however, vary the pose. Some charioteers extend their arms forward to grasp reins. Striding bowmen place one leg at right angles to the body and twist their shoulders to hold their weapons at one side. Kneeling archers crouch in a three-point pose resting on one knee (again, see FIG. 4-19). While all of the warriors seem to have come from the same population, they exhibit many variations, especially in renderings of facial features, hair, and other details. High-ranking officers, for example, wear special caps, a scarf tied at the neck, and tassels on their chest armor (again, see FIG. 4-18). Other figures wear different headgear and armor. Still others are not armored. By combining many finishing details—moustaches, chin whiskers, topknots, and plaited hair—the potters made the basic types into an array of individuals. Many writers assert that every warrior is unique. To the extent that each figure was finished by hand, this is literally true. Conceptually, however, this army is a catalogue of types rather than a collection of renderings of actual individuals.

The production of these warriors must have occupied many hands for some years, but no textual sources actually hint at the project. Impressed and scratched marks on the warriors and horses document the many workshops or gangs of workers drawn mostly from the capital region. These laborers were of necessity housed and fed at or near the site, they required supervision and control, and they and their work needed a variety of supplies and other support services. The management of the work must have been as demanding as the design and execution of the figures. Clay for sculpting and kilns for firing were among the most important parts of the production process, each entailing general laborers and more skilled artisans. The actual crafting of

4-19 Kneeling bowman
Qin, c. 210 BCE. Earthenware, height 48″ (1.22 m). Trench 2, Lishan, Lintong, Shaanxi. Museum of Qin Figures and Horses, Lintong



4-20 Nude figurines
Former Han, 2nd century BCE. Earthenware, height 24½″ (62 cm). Yangling, Xianyang, Shaanxi. Shaanxi Archaeology Institute, Xi'an

figures and horses had to be divided into many steps, combining molds and free-hand work. The component parts had to be assembled in sequence, fired, and painted. The multiple stages in lacquer production recorded in the inscription cited above (see page 133) were certainly analogous to the many teams of workers who carried out each portion of this process. The achievements of the Lishan site are therefore collective ones. No single architect or designer is identified, although responsibility rested ultimately with the chancellors, the highest officials in the empire. Their success lay in bringing the project to completion—strong testimony to the ability of the Qin state to enforce its will and to ensure performance to its standards.

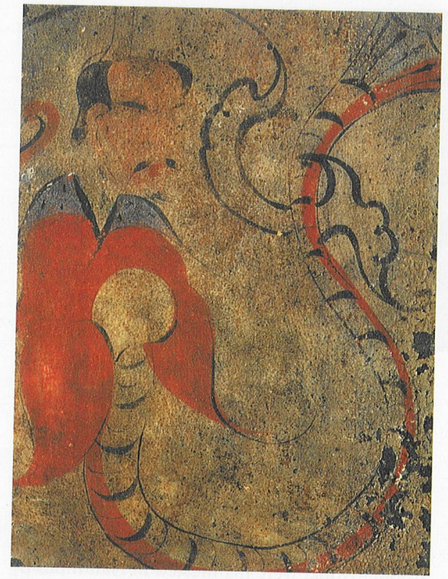
Han Imperial Tombs

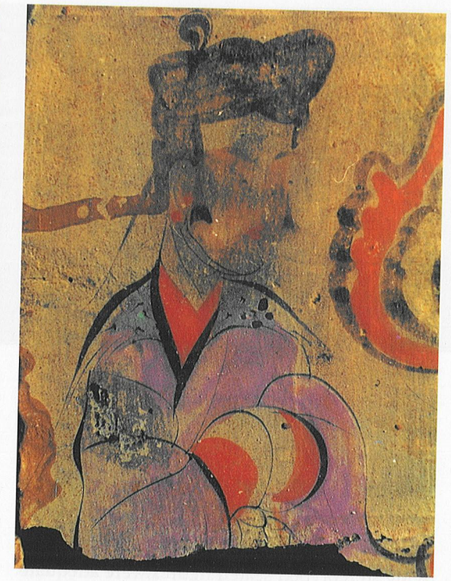
Many early texts assert that "Han perpetuated the Qin system." This was no less true of imperial burials than government institutions and practice. The Former Han tombs near Chang'an and those from Later Han at Luoyang continued many features of Lishan. Each emperor established funerary parks during his reign, by convention starting in the second year. A large budget, perhaps as much as one-third of state revenues, was dedicated to this project. Labor forces under the supervision of the Court Architect worked on site; one instance records thirty thousand workers. The court employed other court bureaus, especially the Artisans of the Eastern Garden, to prepare burial furnishings of all kinds, including the jade suits discussed below (see FIG. 4-23). The Han emperors, unlike the First Emperor, were accompanied by their empresses, who had separate, smaller parks nearby. In addition, it was the custom in Former Han to have satellite burials with mounds in the same area as a reward to high officials and meritorious generals (see the sculpture from the tomb of General Huo Qubing, FIG. 4-26). Pits containing valuables also continued Qin and pre-Qin practice. The rhinoceros discussed above (FIG. 4-14) is simply one of many fine objects from the vicinity of the tomb of Emperor Wu.

Workshops within the northwest corner of Han Chang'an produced ceramic figurines for use at the tombs. One of the largest examples consists of about 2500 warriors on foot and horseback from the tomb of a Han general near the Changling. More recently, about two dozen trenches have been probed in the area of the Yangling, the tomb of Emperor Jing (r. 157–141 BCE) and his consort, Empress Wang (d. 126 BCE). The figurines excavated here have gained attention because they are nude renderings (FIG. 4-20). The Yangling figurines are much smaller than their Qin prototypes at only 24 inches (60 cm). Unlike the former, they were made from two-part molds rather than assembled from parts. Several facial types are found, but other features are generalized: squared feet, thin torsos, a deep groove from shoulder blades to buttocks, and thick necks. Moreover, the figurines were completely painted, fully costumed, and armed. Thus these are mannequins that wore miniature armor and robes over their bodies, rather than proper nudes. Although the total number is not yet known, several thousand seems likely, and this is not a unique case. This was an ambitious, costly project, yet more modest than the Qin army and hence not a comparable drain on the economy.

Myths and Portraits

The cultures of ancient China exhibit many features also found among other ancient peoples, but a systematic mythology is not among them. Only during the Eastern Zhou period are traces of mythology found with any consistency in extant literary sources. Most of these works are compilations of the Warring States period such as the *Songs of the South (Chu ci)* and *Classic of Mountains and Oceans (Shan hai jing)*, anecdotes found in *Zhuangzi* (the writings attributed to the Eastern Zhou thinker of that name), or other fleeting references. It is possible that the culture heroes who crafted the basic elements of Chinese culture may not have been known prior to Han times. On the other





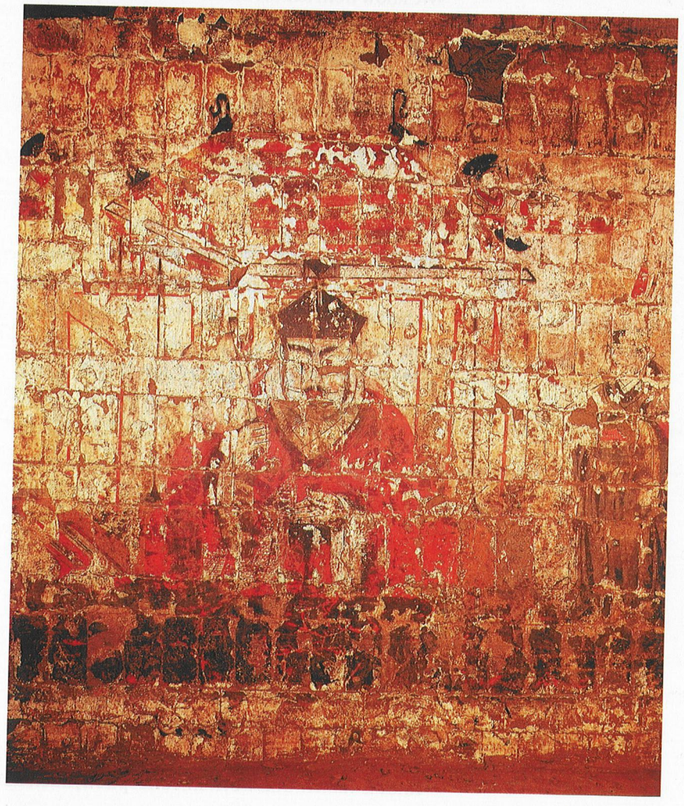
4-21 Fu Xi and Nu Wa
Details of painted hollow bricks. Former Han, 1st century BCE. Tomb of Bu Qianqiu, Luoyang, Henan. Luoyang Ancient Tombs Museum

4-22 Portrait of tomb lord
Wall painting. Tomb at Anping, Hebei. Later Han, c. 176 CE

This early "portrait," one of very few possible examples from the Han, can be dated by inscription to 176 CE and identified as the tomb's master, a man by the name of Zhao. The excavators speculate that a famous eunuch official of this area, one Zhao Zhong, might have been buried here.

hand, there is an obvious gap between what was preserved in texts made for the elite and a much larger body of ideas current in common society. One contribution of recent archaeological finds is toward a better understanding of Han mythology.

One of the most widespread mythological subjects in Han art is that of the twin beings Fu Xi and Nu Wa. Few pre-Han texts mention their names or variants of them. Nu Wa is credited with the creation of the human race and Fu Xi with such contributions as hunting and fishing, the Eight Trigrams, and time reckoning. As a complementary, male–female pair, they are also associated with the dualistic *yin–yang* concept, and pictorial renderings reinforce this. In the tomb of a certain Bu Qianqiu at Luoyang, for example, Fu Xi and Nu Wa are drawn on ceiling bricks at opposite ends of the gabled chamber (FIG. 4-21). Both assume three-quarter poses with simple robes over their upper torsos and serpentine bodies that curl upward. The drawing is thin and resilient, but wider strokes and touches of color augment the careful detail of facial features. Infill color is used on the robes: red for Fu Xi and purple for Nu Wa. Both in this tomb and in several others at Luoyang, the two figures



are physically separated and flanked by sun and moon, respectively.

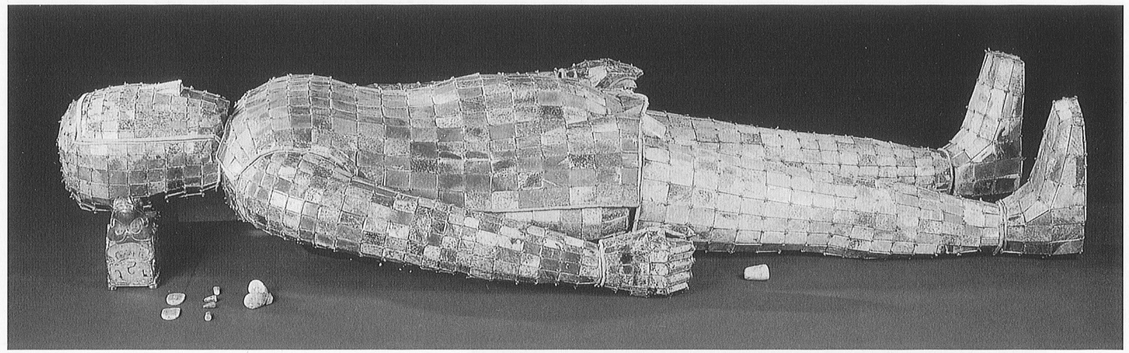
Figures from human history also occupied a prominent place in Han pictorial art. If myths embody fundamental notions about the workings of the natural world, then didactic stories convey messages about the workings of human society. The Shandong reliefs and others from Henan, Shaanxi, and Sichuan often picture stories of brave warriors, chaste women, filial sons, and worthy officials. Tales are generally resolved into their most basic characters and props. Jing Ke's attempted assassination of the First Emperor requires little more than the two protagonists, a knife, and the column in which the misguided weapon lodged. For a filial son who plays for his aged parents, three figures and some toys will suffice. In the case of the "painted basket" from Lelang unearthed in Korea in the 1930s, brief cartouches identifying stereotyped seated figures were adequate. We know from textual accounts that many of these tales were painted on the walls of Han palaces, and some have been found in painted tombs as well.

Formal portraits were also a part of Han palace decoration. The Han emperors memorialized worthy figures for their achievements, and the same impulse figures in funerary art as well. A clear case is the Later Han tomb at Anping (Hebei) dated by inscription to 176 CE. This is a large and exceptionally well built tomb that has been attributed tentatively to a wealthy eunuch, one Zhao Zhong. The central chamber features a procession of eighty-two chariots, the entourage of a great man. A side chamber displays a large portrait 6 feet tall (1.8 m; FIG. 4-22) of an imposing man seated on a low couch within a canopy and screen. This is a static, frontal rendering: the peaked cap, symmetrical face, and rigid pose are iconic. One hand holds a fan, while the other gestures. A white and black collar and cuffs complement the bright red robes. The drawing here is springy and thin; the painter expended considerable energy on brows, whiskers, and moustache. Those details suffice to transform a generic seated figure type into a specific individual. His smaller scaled attendants stand only as tall as their seated master. Other Later Han murals match this work in conception, such as the tomb at nearby Wangdu (Hebei) with its official staff and the tombs at Mi County (Henan) with their display of a lavish life-style. This type of portraiture presages the work of such noted painters as Gu Kaizhi (c. 344/345–406 CE) and Yan Liben (d. 673 CE; see chapters 5 and 6).

The Souls and the After-life

Death became an occasion to reaffirm important ideological values: the honor and respect due to seniors, the duties incumbent on juniors, the centrality of lineage and cult obligations. Tombs were objects of intense concern, although there are no treatises or essays by Han literati that explicitly detail their features and significance. Instead texts describe the ritualized behavior of family and community at death rites, especially mourning. The rationalizations of the Eastern Zhou thinker Xunzi were manifested in Han times by a large-scale commitment to "rich burials." While some policy discussions and social critics castigated society for the costs and superstitions associated with these burial practices, there was never any significant diminution in the social, economic, and ideological investment made in tombs and their furnishings.

Death was viewed by many writers as the separation of two souls. In life, these souls animated both the physical body and the mental faculties. An earthly soul, *po*, remained in or near the corpse at death and was commonly believed to be a recipient of the care and sustenance offered to the dead through burial rites. An ethereal or heavenly soul, *hun*, was thought to depart the body at death, ascending to extraterrestial realms, but its fate was obscure. An untended grave might cause the transformation of the *po*-soul into an evil, marauding spirit or ghost (*gui*) that caused harm. Several competing schema describing the fate of the ethereal soul are visible both in texts and material evidence. For some, there was the cult of the Eastern Isles in the ocean, inhabited by spirits or immortals (*shen* or *xian*) who enjoyed a blissful eternity. Both the First Emperor of Qin and Emperor Wu of Han sent expeditions by sea in search of these isles. For others, especially in the south, the wandering soul was, if



4-23 Burial suit
Former Han, c. 113 BCE. Jade plaques with gold thread, overall length 6′2″ (1.88 m). Tomb of Liu Sheng, Mancheng, Hebei. Hebei Museum, Shijiazhuang

possible, to be summoned back to the bosom of the family. Poems in *The Songs of the South* (*Chu ci*) and rites described in the *Li ji (Record of Ritual)* summarize these views. In the last years of Former Han and especially in Later Han times, a newer cult arose to a divine spirit in a distant westerly realm, the Queen Mother of the West on Mount Kunlun. Tombs and their furnishings also suggest multiple agendas. Filial devotion, as exemplified in didactic tales and by great exertions at the death of a parent, was not incommensurate with a cautious respect for the evil potential of ghosts. An inventory of goods made explicitly for burial was both an economical alternative to consigning valuables to the grave and a symbolic statement of the deceased's status, real or imaginary. Wall paintings and impressed tiles recorded this life, but other grave goods suggest complex ideas about the after-life not well represented in existing literature.

The idea that various practices or elixirs could somehow prolong life, retard death, and/or achieve a physical immortality led to the creation of many artifacts associated with the tomb and constitutes a major theme in other arts. The Han emperors adopted the practice of jade burial shrouds, full-size body suits of jade plaques knitted together with wire of gold, silver, or bronze (FIG. 4-23). The "Treatise on Rites" of the *History of Later Han* (*Hou Han shu*) describes such suits, but not until 1968 did well-preserved examples come to light in two rock-cut tombs near Mancheng (Hebei). These were the burials of Prince Liu Sheng of Zhongshan (d. 113 BCE), a brother of Emperor Wu, and of Dou Wan, member of a prominent consort family. More than a dozen other suits are now known, and several have been restored. Each corpse was actually prepared with plugs placed in or on the "nine bodily orifices," including eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth. The jade suits, made to order by the Artisans of the Eastern Garden in Chang'an, consist of separate face masks and stocking caps, chest and back pieces, arms, gloves, legs, and boots. Although in principle gold wire was restricted to the Son of Heaven, it was used at Mancheng. The jade suits are merely one part of the goods and practices associated with longevity and immortality in the Zhongshan tombs. The rock-cut mountain site may have been associated with the mountainous realms of the immortals. The coffins holding the enshrouded remains were themselves lined with jade. A large number of auspicious disks, *bi*, were placed in and around the suits. Deluxe bronze vessels with extraordinary bird-script inlay in turn contained medicinal wine with special qualities. A deluxe incense burner inlaid with gold in the form of a mountain amid the waves depicts immortals amid the peaks and clouds of incense. The latter objects, while not made for burial, were no less linked to the cult of the immortals and elixirs.

Related ideas played a part in the design, construction, and furnishings of the two well-preserved tombs at Mawangdui. We have discussed objects from the tomb throughout this chapter. The burials are veritable time capsules of elite life in the early second century BCE. Silk garments and fabric, lacquer wares, musical instruments, food stuffs, and personal accessories were consigned to the grave as the personal effects of the Lady

4-24 Painted banner
Former Han, after 168 BCE. Silk, height 6′8¾″ (2.05 m). Mawangdui Tomb 1, Changsha, Hunan. Hunan Museum, Changsha

of Dai (d. 168 or after) and her son, respectively, but also as markers of their status. An inscribed wooden tablet in the son's tomb (Tomb 3) suggests that his earthly soul was turned over to the supervision of an underground bureaucracy that mirrored living society. Still other items were prepared for the funeral and burial, including wooden figurines of household servants, surrogate objects (wooden *bi* disks, clay coins, and vessels), and, not least, painted silk banners for the funeral procession.

The two banners from Mawangdui are among our richest visual sources for the Former Han period and the best preserved examples of painting from that period (FIG. 4-24). They correspond in function to the banners that carried an inscription with the name of the deceased flanked by the sun and moon that are described in ritual texts. Here heavenly and earthly realms are pictured schematically with the deceased. Both banners are long panels of silk with "arms" attached at the top. Their T-shape creates a two-part composition: a heavenly zone with sun and moon at the top and a vertical stem below, dominated by intertwined ascending dragons. The heavens display not only the two most important celestial orbs but also other dragons. In the case of the lady's banner, a serpent-bodied creature floats, coiled, at the top center. Identifications of this figure vary. Some writers favor a local diety known as the "Torch Dragon," ruler of the heavens who controlled night and day. A gate with figures depicted as Han officials wearing mortar-board hats marks the lower edge of the heavens in each banner. Ascending dragons, also a consistent feature of textual descriptions, fill the stem of each banner. Two dragons ascend for the lady and four for her son. Between the dragon necks in each case is a platform on which stands the deceased with attendants. These figures are portraits in the notional sense that specific details were intended to link the images to individuals. The lady, for example, leans forward on a staff of a kind found in her

tomb. Below the *bi* disk through which the dragon bodies are plaited is a second platform. Here a gathering of figures attends an ensemble of ritual vessels and a cloth-wrapped form that could be the corpse. This reading of the discrete images suggests a temporal dimension: the portrait above is either the lady or son in life, or ascending as a spirit, while the ritual scene below would represent the funeral. However specific identifications are argued, the total composition serves as a diagram relating Heaven and Earth, human and spirit realms.

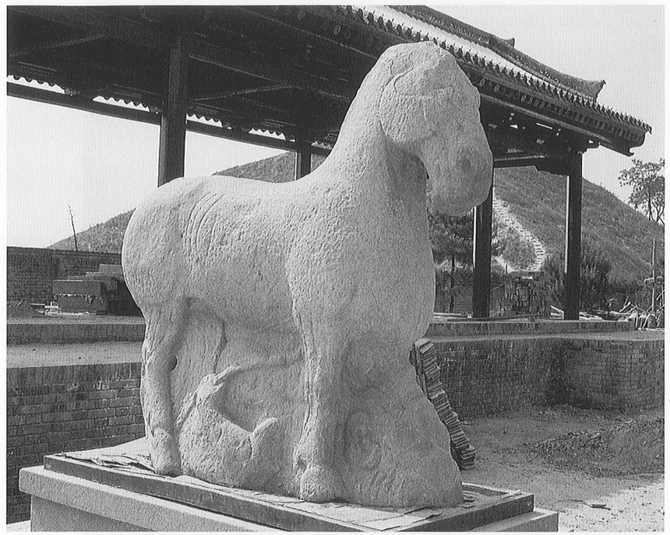
The ideas discussed here were not stable during the entire span of the Qin–Han empires. Nor were they ever articulated definitively in a single authoritative text, although many Former Han writers attempted syntheses. The shadowy creatures of the Mawangdui banners were but a fraction of a larger natural and supernatural universe of peoples, animals, and spirits that recur in essays, poetry, and visual arts. Both words and images circulated throughout the empire, making regional traditions more widely known. In retrospect, these diverse strands of belief and imagination underlie many later traditions of Chinese culture.

BEYOND THE MIDDLE KINGDOM: PEOPLES OF THE FRONTIERS

Beyond the frontier commanderies of the Han realm lived many peoples who interacted with the empire. Han treatises describe some of these peoples and regions, especially those west of the Jade Gate in far western Gansu. After the investigations

4-25 Artist's rendition of chariot canopy ornament
Former Han, late 2nd–early 1st century BCE. Bronze with inlay, height 10½″ (26.5 cm). Sanpan Shan, Ding County, Hebei. Hebei Cultural Relics Institute, Shijiazhuang

The designs on this fitting for the canopy pole of a deluxe chariot record the Han-period fascination with exotic wonders and *qi* (cosmic breath) in all its manifestations. Imperial parks like the Shanglin replicated the diversity of the natural world within their precincts with a comparable menagerie of animals and birds.



4-26 Horse and barbarian
Former Han, c. 117 BCE.
Granite, length 6′3″ (1.9 m).
Tomb of Huo Qubing, Maoling, Xingping, Shaanxi.
Maoling Museum, Xingping

of the emissary Zhang Qian in 138 and 115 BCE, the court was better informed about the statelets on the southern and northern flanks of the Kunlun and Tianshan ranges (modern Xinjiang). The court's interest was not idle. Zhang Qian was dispatched in hopes of persuading the Yuezhi, who had been displaced westward by the Xiongnu, to join Han in fighting their common enemy. (Descendants of these Yuezhi—the Kushans—figure in chapter 5 as patrons of Buddhism in northern India and Pakistan.) Such an alliance was never formed, and for the first century of Han rule the empire was forced to buy peace with steppe neighbors through marriages and gift giving. Only in the last decade of the second century BCE did the situation change as a result of the successful campaigns of such generals as Wei Qing and Huo Qubing. During the first century BCE, the Han empire was in the position to establish an administrative apparatus to regulate its relations with the statelets of the Tarim Basin. The "Western Regions" (Xi yu) were under the military supervision of Han garrisons near Turfan and further west near Karashahr (Yanqi). The Han experience with peoples of the west encompassed heroic military exploits, the first documented contacts with far distant cultures such as Ferghana and Sogdia, as well as the material legacy of tribute from the statelets of the Silk Road.

Among the generals serving Emperor Wu, Huo Qubing was a prodigy. When he died at twenty-four years of age in 117 BCE, the general of light cavalry was already renowned for his exploits in the Gansu corridor. The emperor ordered extraordinary rites and a satellite burial just east of his own Maoling. The *Han History* (*Han shu*) records particulars such as Xiongnu warriors lining the roadway from the capital to the tomb site as an honor guard. The Director of Works in the Eastern District of the Capital was charged with the construction of Huo's tomb, which for the first time incorporated stone sculpture. The intention seems to have been to memorialize the young general's exploits by an array of huge granite boulders carved as animal denizens of the mountainous area where his victories had been won. Today at least sixteen of these carved boulders can be seen at the site. They range from the most cursory shaping of natural stones to more fully realized three-dimensional works, such as a horse standing astride a bearded barbarian (FIG. 4-26). This work has been famed since in 1914 Victor Segalen acclaimed it "the oldest in the repertory of Chinese sculpture in the round." Segalen devoted a chapter to it in his pioneering volume on Chinese sculpture.

The horse is a relative of the steppe ponies of the First Emperor's army, albeit realized more as wrap-around reliefs on the block than as free-standing sculpture. The area within the horse's four stiff legs is not cut away. Here we notice the features of a bearded figure on his back, head between the forelimbs, arms and feet visible on the other three sides. With its beard and grotesque features, the figure is assumed to be a fallen Xiongnu warrior. The bow in one hand is matched by a spear stabbing the horse's belly in the other. Even if the wound is serious, there is no response from the horse. Nor do we see any saddle or other gear to indicate this horse might have been the general's own mount. This content is conveyed with minimal carving: parallel striations evoke the warrior's hair and beard, deep grooves suggest the horse's muscles, crude lines describe the horse's cheek. Even weathered after two thousand years, it seems unlikely that the original effect was significantly more

detailed or finished. Two other kneeling horses are rather more animated, caught in postures found in real life. They too do not differ in surface detail or the use of the block. Other works of similar scale, material, and workmanship are in fact known from elsewhere in the capital region, including the Shanglin Park. Art historians have usually portrayed the Huo Qubing stones as the inception of large stone sculpture. But as the Qin underground army shows, sculpture of some scale and ambition had been produced earlier.

Han interaction with the many peoples of the south did not lead to military operations like those in the Western Regions, nor did it include tribute exchanges with a variety of statelets. The main southern states included the independent kingdom of Nanyue occupying modern-day Guangdong, subordinated in 111 BCE, which is discussed above in connection with jade working. The kingdom of Dian in Yunnan, on the other hand, gained the recognition of the Han court, as shown by a Han gold seal recovered from a Dian tomb at Shizhaishan (Jinning, Yunnan). Images of the south were widespread in Han literature and art, as an inlaid bronze tube from a chariot found in a tomb in Ding County (Hebei) illustrates most vividly (FIG. 4-25). The four registers of this cylinder, shown flattened out in this view, are a fitting summation of much Han-period art. Rows of circular and diamond-shaped inlay, which the pictorial content must work around, overlay each register. The pictorial content is organized above and below looping bands of gold inlay that spiral upward and so evoke a ridge of hills. A myriad animals and birds fill in the remaining surface, as do curling tendrils and the leaves of vines. The denizens of this tropical world include flying horses, deer, bears, tigers, boars, a dragon, and peacocks, as well as an elephant and a camel, each with riders. The riders with their pointed topknots themselves would seem to be natives of the south. The archer on horseback who confronts a leaping tiger wears the headgear of a Han warrior. This is a complex composition, of absorbing interest and impressive energy, a visual equivalent to the rhapsodies produced by contemporary court poets. It is also a work of high craft and great imagination, worthy of careful examination in its own right. The tomb from which it comes has never been properly reported, but it probably belonged to yet another prince of Zhongshan. The tube could well have been made in an imperial workshop in Chang'an. It is thus also more evidence for the court bureaus that set the standards of the day and for the luxury lifestyle of the elite.

The imprint of the Qin and Han imperial states will be felt throughout the remainder of this volume. The imperial state and the society it engineered became "China." For the following two millennia, no other order was imaginable. The emperor on the throne was as firmly established as the sun and moon in the sky. The demands of an authoritarian state apparatus were as natural as the patriarchal order of the family. The regional diversity of natural products, industries, cuisines, and arts were nonetheless seen as components of the empire, a whole greater than its parts. The institutions of the imperial state defined civilization. Even the most distant barbarians acknowledged its manifold virtues. Han civilization impacted neighboring regions of East Asia far more than Chinese cultures of earlier times. Elements of Han culture were planted on the Korean peninsula, in Manchuria, across the Mongolian steppe, along the Gansu corridor, in the southwestern plateaus, and in the northern reaches of Vietnam. Just as Han colonists took from local peoples, the local cultures assimilated aspects of Han social organization, material culture, thought, and art. The early states that arose in these regions had a protracted history of both borrowing and resisting Han culture. The arrival of Han civilization was a significant catalytic agent in the culture histories of all East Asia.